

## **Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success Meeting**

October 9, 2012

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Chicago – Shared Conference Room

JRTC – 100 W. Randolph, 9-040

Springfield – Lt. Governor's Office

Capitol Building – Room 214

### **Minutes**

#### **Member Participants**

**Chicago** – Elaine Allensworth, Akeshia Craven, Stacy Davis-Gates, Vanessa Kinder, Rich Lesniak, Mark McDonald, Melissa Mitchell, Miguel del Valle, Jack Wuest

**Springfield** – Rhonda Jenkins, Lynne Haeffele, Al Llorens, Jeff Mays, Candace Mueller, Diane Rutledge, Julie Wollerman

**Phone** – Andrea Brown, Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, Rep. Sandy Cole, Early King, Sen. Kimberly Lightford, Jane Russell

#### **Other Participants**

Chicago: Julie Smith, Peg Agnos, Jason Tyszko, Adam Weiner, Sarah Myerscough-Mueller

Springfield: Lara Mbayed

#### **I. Welcome – Introduction of Co-Chairs**

Julie Smith welcomed participants and introduced Miguel del Valle and Elaine Allensworth as committee co-chairs.

##### **a. Purpose of the Commission**

**b.** Miguel del Valle thanked commission members for their participation. He noted the need to improve the numbers of high school graduates. He then gave a recap of recent legislative activity: last session the Governor supported increasing the compulsory age from 17 to 18. (Sen del Valle was the sponsor in 2004 when the Senate increased the compulsory age from 16 to 17.) Members of General Assembly agreed to hold consideration of the compulsory attendance bill in the Spring session. Senator Kimberly Lightford and Representative Linda Chapa LaVia drafted an amendment to the bill that established this commission. It was created to study the issue of high school graduation, with the goals of increasing the graduation rate, educational attainment and ultimately improving the workforce in this state. The Commission plans a series of meetings to discuss the issues and identify best practices. The Chair expressed particular concern with the high African American and Hispanic dropout rates. There have been improvements but more is needed.

##### **c. Timeframe for Commission Work and Report**

- i. Miguel del Valle: The timeframe for the Commission will be different from what was passed in the bill. There will be a request to the bill's sponsors to extend the timeframe for the final report. Members will discuss the timeframe and the schedule of meetings as we go forward.

#### **II. Introduction of the Legislative Members of the Commission**

Senator Kimberly Lightford, Representative Linda Chapa LaVia and Representative Sandy Cole introduced themselves.

**a. Review of SB 3259 and Legislative Intent**

- i. Members reviewed the contents of SB 3259, noting that the commission will also be considering budgetary issues and resources to support programs to increase graduation rates.
  1. Sen. Kimberly Lightford commented that she felt that the group was on the right page in terms of responding to the issues laid out in the bill.

**III. Member Introductions – background and experience**

Each member of the commission introduced him or herself and described their background and experience.

**IV. Discussion – High School Achievement and Success**

**a. Current Graduation Rates**

- i. Members discussed questions and concerns that they have on how graduation rates are defined and if they are accurately recorded. Members asked for the current operational definition and clarification of how the rate is calculated by ISBE. Several people commented on the NGA agreement to determine a process for measuring and calculating graduation rates
  1. Elaine Allensworth noted that we need to understand who is included in the definition of transfer, graduate, and dropout? One can over-count graduates, as the state rates aggregate school district rates. There are also issues around how well school staff understands the terms and coding. The NGA helped to develop a formula, but who gets counted and in which category is sometimes the result of local practice in schools and districts.
  2. Several members suggested that we ask someone from ISBE to attend the next meeting and explain the current method for calculating the rate. It was also asked whether the ILDS system will provide data and answers to these questions in the future. An invitation will be extended to Supt Koch and ISBE staff to attend the next meeting.
    - a. Miguel del Valle said that the plan was to ask ISBE Superintendent Chris Koch to speak with us about these things, but we wanted to be sure that we have all our questions prepared in advance. It sounds like we have agenda item #1 for the next meeting: How do we ensure that the graduation rate is a true measure of what we intend to measure?

**b. Freshmen On-Track to Graduate**

- i. Elaine Allensworth – The definition used by CPS for an On-Track Freshman is a student who has failed no more than one course in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It is a very strong predictor of the likelihood of graduation (more than race, economic status, test scores). The struggle for schools includes how to keep other things from interfering with academic progress and how to determine what schools can do to help kids who are slipping?
- ii. Members suggested looking at research on early leavers and determining the extent of that problem. Akeshia Craven also noted that when students enter high school over-age, there is a greater chance that they will not complete high school.
- iii. Jack Wuest – Alternative schools will build in a full-time mentor (1:12 mentor-to-student ratio) whose job is to keep kids on track. Mentors have socio-emotional training to increase their impact.

- iv. Stacy Davis-Gates – Schools sometimes start strong and identify the students who need help but then might lose track of them over time. Longevity should be a priority in this discussion. We have to make a commitment to maintain and appropriately alter services for those students whose needs change.
- v. Rhonda Jenkins – I attended a conference that included data from a survey on why students drop out (Bloomington Dropout Summit). The primary reason was the lack of a single person with whom they could connect and who expected them to succeed. There is a need for mentorship programs in high schools. (Could be supported by outside groups -parents, faith-based organizations, civic clubs, etc).
  - 1. Miguel del Valle – Making connections is a key Pathways component. There is also a need to look at school suspensions and their disproportionate impact on Special Education students and African American and Latino males.
    - a. Lynn Haeffele – How does this question overlap with the work of the School Success Task Force, which is looking at discipline? We should connect with that task force to be aware of the work that they have done.
    - b. Al Llorens noted that research done by other groups shows that zero tolerance policies have a major impact on school suspensions and expulsions. Districts that lack adequate social services have kids pushed into the discipline pipeline. Thornton had a program where kids on track at end of sophomore year received a “half-cap” recognition to show that they’re being tracked and that their success is appreciated.
  - 2. Mark McDonald commented on the resources that are available in DuPage school districts. Kids often drop out because they believe they can’t do the work. The schools in his district offer a number of reading courses to help below-level students catch up with their work.

#### **c. Credit Recovery**

- i. Members discussed the importance of credit recovery. If students feel that they can never catch up, then there is no point in coming to school. Jack Wuest noted that California allows students up to age 24 to get a high school degree and allows them to re-enroll through age 24. An online system that allowed students to track their credit earning and progress might be helpful.
  - 1. Credit recovery can be competency-based rather than seat-time based. One needs to consider when the student can complete this work. Does credit recovery take place after a full day of school? Is this only a summer option? Should credit recovery courses focus on practical applications (vocational courses, etc.). How should courses be delivered? Can computer-based instruction serve a student who has struggled in a regular classroom?
- ii. Jeff Mays noted that the Quincy school board has grappled with this issue from some time (particularly with discipline cases). Are schools pushing kids out in order to get the graduation rate up? We need to assure that the high school diploma has meaning.

#### **d. College and Career Readiness**

- i. Illinois is in the process of implementing Common Core Standards, which in theory should lead to dramatic improvements in achievement levels and student outcomes. Along with Common core, the Pathways Initiative will strengthen college

and career readiness for our students. Dual enrollment/dual credit is one way to keep kids interested in school. There are parts of the state and some community college districts (such as Elgin) where they've had higher levels of participation with dual credit. CPS and the City Colleges are working to expand these opportunities. ACT scores have been the benchmark for college and career readiness in Illinois. There are concerns with using ACT as this measure but it is the only available number at this time. P-20 Council has an on-going work group that is developing (along with the education agencies) a clear definition of college and career readiness. Members discussed how we can contribute to the on-going work.

1. Members discussed to what extent students are graduating ready for college or careers. Some Colleges use the ACT for admission, but what determines the readiness measure for students who do not submit the ACT for post-secondary work? What options are open to these students and what do their credentials prepare them to do?
  2. Some members questioned the ACT measure and the characterization that only 25 to 30% of high school graduates are prepared for college. More students do attend and are successful. The Common Core offers much better means to assess and measure student achievement. This should eliminate or minimize differentiation in course work and what we expect students to know when they finish high school.
  3. Several people noted that studies have shown that GPA is a better predictor than the ACT in predicting college success.
  4. Jeff Mays noted that the ACT is the measure that is currently available to us and that until something better comes along, he would hope that students do better on the exam than worse. He also felt that Pathways should help and that students should have more options to complete certificates that build credentials for them.
- ii. Members agreed that we should focus on topics and issues that identify ways to keep kids on track to graduate. Illinois has a stated goal to reach 60% of the adult population with a post-secondary credential by 2025. This Commission needs to focus on how to achieve this goal.
  - iii. There was also discussion on how well we prepare kids socially and emotionally for college and careers. Are young people prepared to handle the emotional, behavioral and developmental rigors of college and the workforce?
  - iv. Members felt it was important to understand what types of jobs will be available to students and how they need to be prepared. We also need to understand who are the students who are not graduating? What are their impediments? How do we remove the obstacles? What are we doing right for those that are graduating and how can we maintain those efforts? Programs need to be in place that supersede leadership changes in schools.
    1. Members agreed that we should ask Dr. Koch and ISBE to give us a profile of students who succeed and those who dropout. What is the distribution across the State? Is there uniformity in the types of students across the state? Are there currently things being done by individual school districts that are effective in reducing the number of dropouts?
      - a. Miguel del Valle – Legislators want recommendations for the spring 1) may need legislative action or 2) can be executed by ISBE or 3) or can encourage action at the school or district level.

- v. Members agreed that addressing academic deficiencies is a major part of this issue. Response to Intervention is in place but there are concerns in how this will work for each student. We need to see how many students are high school ready? Students who enter high school reading at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level require very different intervention than students reading at a 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade level.

**e. Current Options for Dropouts**

- i. Chicago has charters but these options are not as available across the state. Truancy program funding has been cut in the ISBE budget.
- ii. DuPage County had a program where kids could leave rather than be expelled and still graduate on time. The funding was cut but schools have tried to continue the program. Can we determine how many alternative slots are available and the quality of alternative programs?
- iii. Members discussed the possibility of partnerships with outside organizations and to look at what other states are doing. Can the community help to keep kids in school? In what ways?

**f. Adults Who Need a High School Diploma**

- i. There are limited programs. City Colleges and other community colleges offer some options. Major issues include: flexible scheduling, credits for life experience, competency credit.
  - 1. Jack Wuest left an informational packet on charter schools for dropouts and various state programs for dropouts.
    - a. Material can be posted and shared on the P-20 website for this commission. It will serve as a central repository for commission.

**V. Preparing the Commission Report**

- a. Members discussed possible experts who could make presentations to the group. Miguel and Elaine will reach out to see who might be available to join us.
  - i. Jeff Mays will contact the organizers of the Bloomington summit and America's Promise members to get their material from the Dropout conference. Material can be shared on the website.
  - ii. We would like to see if there is any data on what has happened since raising the compulsory age to 17?
    - 1. Miguel del Valle – ISBE will be asked to provide what they have, but it is limited since there has not been much time since the change. It will be difficult to draw firm conclusions.
- b. Members are encouraged to help identify best practices and effective schools. There might be schools or districts that have very strong performance results. IERC has a report on what happens to high school seniors that will be shared with the group.
- c. As we examine data, it is important to also know the level of funding support that is available per student and how much that varies by district.

**VI. Other Business/Appointment Documents**

- a. Sen. Kimberly Lightford asked that the Governor's Office submit a request to rescind the deadline until December 31.

**VII. Next Meeting /Adjourn**

- a. Miguel del Valle – The ISBE presentation will be the focus of the next meeting, Oct. 19.
- b. Meeting adjourned.